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SIR ROBERT HART AND HIS LIFE WORK IN CHINA

By Edward B. Drew, A.M., Commissioner of Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, retired.

I propose to set before you, as best I may, the life work of Sir Robert Hart—a career which Professor Williams of Yale in his recent book on the Burlingame Mission pronounces “the most remarkable and creditable of any European, perhaps, in Asia during the (nineteenth) century.”

To this China-loving company I would present my late chief as one who served China with a life-time's unflagging devotedness; and to this body of students I offer his achievements as a convincing example of that wholesome terrestrial kind of genius which is said to consist “in days' works.”

Robert Hart was born in Portadown, County Armagh, in the north of Ireland, on February 20, 1835. He was the oldest of twelve children. His father Henry Hart was fairly well to do and a stern Wesleyan; his mother, a daughter of Mr. John Edgar, was a tender woman who ever held the affections of her children. Not long after Robert's birth the family moved to Hillsborough where he attended his first school, and where the family home long remained. At the age of eleven he was sent for a year to a Wesleyan school in Taunton, England; his father taking him there in person. At Taunton he began the study of Latin; and Latin he delighted in and read to the end of his life, it being his daily custom to read some classic author while taking his morning tea. His next move was to the Wesleyan Connexional School at Dublin. Here he was graduated at the top of his class at the age of fifteen, with a reputation for love of mischief, as well as for studiousness and a brilliant mind. His solicitous father elected to send him to the new Queen's

University at Belfast, rather than to Trinity College, Dublin—preferring to keep his son near home where he might watch closely over his conduct and where pious influences should guard his character.

In 1853, at the age of eighteen, young Hart received his B.A. degree. He had also taken scholarships and medals in literature and in logic, and had won the distinction of Senior Scholar. It was in this part of his career that he became a favorite student of McCosh, afterwards president of Princeton; and both Dr. McCosh and Sir Robert Hart ever recalled with pleasure their relations at this period, if indeed they did not actually correspond by letter so long as they lived.

Before determining his choice of a profession, Hart began studying for the master's degree; but while he was thus engaged, an opportunity offered itself for competing for a junior post in the British government's consular service in China. He entered as a candidate; but so distinguished had been his university career that he was given the appointment at once without examination. He arrived in China in 1854, and continued for five years in the British consular service, gradually acquiring the Chinese language while serving at Hongkong, Ningpo and Canton, and becoming familiar with both the British and Chinese side of international relations.

His early official experience was gained from the British governor of Hongkong, Sir John Bowring (well known by his noble hymns) and under such able consuls as Alcock, Thomas Taylor Meadows, and Parkes. For most of this period Hart's post was at Ningpo—near enough to the scene of the momentous events then enacting in China to excite the intensest interest of an observant, thoughtful and ambitious young man. The Taiping rebellion was in full career; the rebel leader had already been established at Nanking as his capital for a full year when Hart reached China; and from Ningpo he could observe the Taiping expeditions against Peking. In the study of these stirring times he must have found a stimulating example in his senior, Consul Meadows, who sympathised with the Taipings and in 1856 produced

that still famous book *The Chinese and their Rebellions*. The period of his residence at Ningpo also covered for the most part the events at the neighboring treaty port, not 200 miles away, when from 1853 to 1855, the "Small Swords," (an offshoot of the Taipings) seized and held the Chinese city of Shanghai. There and then were sown the seeds destined to produce but a few years later the "foreign" customs service so-called, with Hart himself presently as the chief—the guiding hand and the farseeing eye. At this period, too, occurred the Lorch "Arrow" incident at Canton, followed by the quarrel between China and Britain, which developed in 1857-58 into the Lord Elgin mission, the seizure of Canton, the naval expedition to Tientsin, and the great treaties of Tientsin of June, 1858. When Canton was taken by the British and French on New Year's day 1858, and the foreign allied commission was created to govern it, Hart was transferred from Ningpo, and made secretary to this commission. This gave him a new kind of training, and a rare opportunity to gain experience of Chinese life and thought and the principles of the Chinese government. His efficiency and promise at this time is exemplified by his memorandum (cited by Morse in *International Relations*¹), written early in 1859, while he was still interpreter to the British consulate at Canton, warning his chief, the British minister, Mr. Bruce, of the hostile preparations which the Chinese were then making to resist the expected British visit to Peking to exchange the ratifications of the treaty of the year before. Morse gives the details of this document, pronouncing it perhaps the most accurate forecast of the disastrous repulse of the British at the Taku forts which followed in June (1859).

We have now reached the moment when Hart was about to enter upon what was to become the career of a long, devoted, and indefatigable life—as the builder and director of one of the most efficient administrative organisms, and perhaps altogether the most unique and peculiar—known to history. What he had gained, up to this time, was an equip-

¹ *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* by Hosea Ballou Morse, Longmans Green and Company, 1910, p. 575.

ment of varied China knowledge, office experience and official caution; what he had always possessed was unusual intellectual gifts, a fine memory, and a rare power of concentration. He had learned by competition with others that his abilities were considerable and that his acquired knowledge and powers of observation were exceptional. In manner he was shy, unobtrusive, almost unsocial among strangers. He lacked the bearing of the self-confident leader; yet he surely knew that he had more "brains" than most men, and need not distrust his powers. He had ambition, and, I doubt not, he had fully resolved within his own breast even now when only twenty-four that he could and would make a great career.

The most definite accounts of the beginnings of the Chinese foreign customs service are those given by Morse in his *Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire*, chapter xii, and by Hart himself in a memorandum written in 1864, which is to be found in the British *China Blue Book* of 1865.

In the fifties of the last century the European and American trade and shipping in China were restricted by the government of that country, theoretically though not altogether in fact, to five cities on or near the coast. One of these "open ports" or "treaty ports" so called, was Canton, another was Shanghai—and there were three minor places, Ningpo, Foochow, and Amoy. Here, naturally, were Chinese custom houses, managed by native officials commissioned from Peking, who were aided by staffs of Chinese clerks, interpreters, duty calculators, goods examiners, watchmen, etc. Nominally the tariff rates were identical at all these places, for there existed a published tariff (on imports and on exports also); and nominally the methods of doing custom house business were identical in details at all the open ports. In practice, however, there was infinite variety, laxity, caprice and even corruption. Bribery or bullying of the Chinese customs officials was pretty common among the foreign merchants. These conditions made it impossible for the would-be honorable importer or exporter to compete with his less scrupulous rivals in trade without stooping to malpractices which he despised. This state of things, for which I find the nearest parallel of our own

place and day in our dishonest system of taxation, is well depicted in Hart's memorandum of 1864 cited above. I remember that a reputable English merchant once described to me how in those lax times he had contrived, by means of bribes shrewdly distributed, to clear without charges a ship laden full of dutiable tea—reporting her at the customs as departing in ballast! Many did this—*must* do it; though the foregoing case was an extreme one. Thus the customs officers got rich; while their government received far less revenue than it was entitled to. The demoralization was general, and the government seemed helpless to correct it.

Now happened a sudden, rather trivial, event at a single Chinese port, which was destined within half a dozen years to bring about a reform hitherto undreamt of, and to produce momentous and far-reaching consequences.

The Taiping rebellion was in full career in central China, though it had not reached Shanghai. But one morning in 1853, a secret sect of malcontents called the "Small Swords" surprised and captured the walled native town of Shanghai. The custom house naturally fell into their hands; whereupon the collector, called the Taotai, took refuge with his staff and underlings outside the city in the suburb specially occupied by the European and American merchants, consuls and traders. No recognition or sympathy was accorded to the "Small Swords," nor were they permitted to enter the European settlement. It was then agreed between the consuls and the dispossessed Taotai that trade should not stop, nor should customs duties cease to be collected.

In order to check the tendency towards collapse of the customs functions, and to safeguard the Chinese revenue, for which indeed the consuls felt themselves in a degree responsible—it seemed best that the Taotai should be sustained and reinforced in the discharge of his duty by a few foreigners of good standing, to be called inspectors and paid by him. Thus was born the foreign Inspectorate of customs—at Shanghai, in June, 1854. One of the first inspectors was Captain Wade, well known twenty years after as Sir Thomas Wade, the British minister. Within about a year Wade was succeeded by Mr. H. N. Lay, till then a British

consular official. From 1855 Mr. Lay directed and developed the new organization for several years. Hart was yet to come. The foreign inspectorate, be it noted, was first established at Shanghai alone—not elsewhere. There it introduced a general reform of customs procedure. All the merchants were compelled to pay duty strictly according to tariff; and while some of them would have preferred the old game of risk and fraud, it was evident that with the new organization lay the path of honesty and self-respect. At the same time the Chinese government for their part began to get a sure and steadily increasing revenue, with the foreigners' qualities of organization, vigilance, and probity in control. The result was that towards the close of 1858, when the new and permanent commercial treaties were adopted under the lead of Lord Elgin, it was in set terms stipulated that the Chinese government might appoint of their own independent choice any foreigners (European or American) whom they wished, to assist them in the collection of their revenue, and that the new system—the foreign inspectorate—should be extended beyond Shanghai and made uniform at all the treaty ports. Laurence Oliphant, Lord Elgin's private secretary, in his delightful book *Lord Elgin's Mission*,² justly anticipated that this stipulation might prove the most important of the new trade regulations. A few months after, viz., late in the spring of 1859, came the first step towards extension of the Shanghai system. The famous and ancient customs port of Canton was to receive a semi-foreign administration on the Shanghai model; and the Chinese viceroy there, who knew young Hart favorably as the interpreter in the British consulate, invited him to initiate the service. Thereupon, the British government's consent have been obtained, Hart resigned the consular service and accepted the post of deputy commissioner (in America termed collector) in the Chinese imperial maritime customs at Canton—a Chinese office, under Chinese control represented by Mr. Lay as the chief; and from that time till the day of his death in London in 1910—a period of fifty-one

² *Lord Elgin's Mission to China and Japan*, by Laurence Oliphant, Harper, 1860, p. 484.

years—Robert Hart remained the devoted and loyal employee of the government of China. It is interesting to recall here what Miss Juliet Bredon points out in her book *The Romance of a Great Career* (written while its subject was still living): In accepting his resignation from the consular service in 1859 the British government cautioned young Hart that should he once leave its employ it would be vain for him to petition to reenter it, if he should subsequently desire to do so. Twenty-six years later the position was reversed when that government of its own accord offered to Sir Robert Hart the post of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at Peking!

In May, 1861, Mr. Lay went to England on leave of absence, and Hart was promoted to fill his place as acting inspector general. Mr. Fitzroy, the commissioner of customs at Shanghai, was to act conjointly with Hart, but as he was unacquainted with the Chinese language, the leadership fell inevitably into Hart's hands. The first thing to be done was to open customs offices according to the new model at those other treaty ports in which the old purely Chinese system had hitherto remained unchanged. Canton had been reformed in 1859, as I have already said; and in 1860 the new form of office had been opened also at Swatow—the only one that year. Meanwhile the allies (British and French) were invading north China, taking Peking, and completing by a supplementary treaty there the re-adjustment of their relations with China, which they mistakenly supposed they had finally accomplished two years before. After 1860 a long peace ensued with improved mutual understanding. The foreign legations now established at the capital began by turning over a new leaf and taking a conciliatory, sympathetic, helpful, friendly attitude towards the Chinese government. The ministers, Bruce and Burlingame, maintained this policy with all their influence. China had had castigation enough; let her now practice the new lesson; grant her time to recuperate and patiently help her to accept and get used to the new conditions—to recover from the violent wrench away from many time honored but evil traditions and methods to which she had been so harshly subjected.

It was to be an era of good feeling, of leading, of hope, of economic revival. Now France and Britain even aided the imperial government in suppressing the Taipings in the region of Shanghai, Soochow and Nanking; and most justly too, for the "coolie Kings" had sunk to the level of bandits and plunderers, and had quite forfeited the first expectations of a pure and honest regime for the peasantry of the Middle Kingdom. With Ward and Gordon as their lieutenants, and enjoying too the open sympathy of the British and French commanders in China, the leaders of the imperialist armies, Tsêng and Li, restored the authority of the government between 1861 and 1863; and the great rebellion ended in July, 1864, with the recovery of Nanking, the Taipings' last stronghold. Hart fully shared the aims of all these leaders; he coöperated with them in the purpose of a pacific and patient re-construction; he aided actively in persuading Gordon to take the field again after he had withdrawn in disgust when the rebel chiefs were executed at Soochow; and most of all he threw himself earnestly into his own special task of creating in the mixed (foreign and Chinese) service now to be developed an institution which China should perceive made for stability of government, encouragement of trade, increase of financial resources, and good will between native and foreigner. Early in 1861 the new customs institutions were opened at Chinkiang, Ningpo and Tientsin. The same year Hart opened offices at Foochow, and also at Hankow and Kiukiang on the Yangtze. In 1862 he opened Amoy; in 1863 Chefoo and two ports in Formosa, and lastly Newchwang (in Manchuria) in 1864. The tale of open treaty ports for foreign trade was now complete, with a custom house of cosmopolitan personnel in Chinese pay at each place. What was done in these formative years was Hart's work. I ay was absent from China between May, 1861 and May, 1863; and when he returned he remained only a few months. He was dismissed in November in consequence of the Lay-Osborn fleet dispute. He represented a dictatorial era which had expired, and even his own legation did not regret his departure.

With his head office established in Peking, Hart threw

himself unsparingly into the task of developing and perfecting the service but recently planted at the 14 ports of trade. He set himself to improving on the *personnel* engaged at the outset, educating all concerned to a better knowledge of their work, raising the general morale, and unifying the methods of procedure at the custom houses. The foreigners (by which term is meant Europeans and Americans) first employed had in some instances been emergency men picked up locally haphazard; some were even adventurers; some were too old to learn new duties, and to acquire the Chinese language; and a few were inferior socially and in education to the other foreigners about them occupied in commerce or in official life. A service thus partly manned with inferior material was regarded with disdain by the public, and Hart at once took steps to change all this. He sent to Europe and to America and secured young men of good birth and university education; these men he trained; he required them to learn Chinese; and he exacted absolute accuracy and efficiency in their office routine. Men who satisfied him he advanced rapidly in those early days, so that within half a dozen years the customs employees rose to a footing of social equality—or even better—with the men about them. At the same time Hart was unfailingly considerate in his treatment of deserving employees who could not attain to his standard for the highest posts. None were discharged because they were old; and to those of mediocre capacity were assigned posts where the work was what they were competent to do.

The service was cosmopolitan; its strength lay partly in the fact that subjects of all the great powers were distributed through every grade. For example, in the custom house at Foochow, when under my charge some years ago, the commissioner was American, his senior deputy was French, and in the successive junior ranks were Germans, Scandinavians, British and Japanese. Of course, in every office by far the largest number of employees were Chinese. The official languages were English and Chinese; in a few departments only one of these, while in most departments, e.g., duty accounts and returns, statistics, expenditures, published

reports on the trade, correspondence, etc., both English and Chinese were used. There was no fixed proportion of employees determined for each nationality, but the patronage was based roughly on each country's commercial interest in the China trade. Britain had the largest share; America, Germany and France came next; and the service contained a lesser number of Danes, Italians, Japanese, Russians, etc. In the highest appointments, called commissionerships, and deputy commissionerships, of which there were in the sixties some 20 and 12 respectively, nearly all these nationalities were represented,—though not in equal proportion; in 1907 when the number of commissioners and deputy commissioners had risen, with the increased number of treaty or open ports, to so many as 37 and 25 respectively these posts were thus distributed, viz., Of the 62 commissioners and deputy commissioners, 37 were British, 5 were American, 5 were French, 5 were German, 3 were Russian, 1 was Danish, 1 was Japanese, 1 was Italian, 1 was Dutch, 1 was Belgian, and 2 were Norwegian.

Hart never lost sight of the practical fact that the service must be cosmopolitan, and that there could be no favoritism as towards one nation or another. He was obliged to satisfy the Chinese foreign office—whose authority was the only superior he must recognize—that his selection of men, and distribution of appointments were just and could withstand the possible complaint or displeasure of each and every Legation. The Chinese foreign office gave Hart absolute control of the service; he would brook no interference with his power and responsibility. The foreign ministers sometimes tried to interfere, or sometimes complained; certainly this happened in an exasperating form in the early years of Hart's career, before his prestige had been established—when it was hard for him to maintain his ground. But as time went on his confidence and authority grew greater; and while he had always to be circumspect and to have sound reasons for his selections and promotions, he took his own way and the foreign ministers preferred to leave these things to his fairness and judgment. It is true to say that in his official acts, and from his official viewpoint Hart was first and fore-

most a Chinese official, second cosmopolitan, and never partial towards his own nationality. Nor do I think that with the vast patronage which he exercised—was *compelled* to exercise—for nearly fifty years, he was ever influenced against, or in favor of a man by prejudice due to nationality.

The organizing work done by Hart in the decades of the sixties and seventies was as immense in amount and importance as it was varied in nature. And then, as subsequently, he did most of it himself alone. Before 1864, i.e., while he was instituting the offices from Canton in the south to Newchwang in the north, he visited in person the places concerned, became acquainted with his men—chiefs and juniors—and arranged matters by personal interviews with the local Chinese officials. These officials naturally had but a dim comprehension of his purposes, or of their correct relation to the new “*foreign*” customs, as they termed it; while they were amply equipped with anti-foreign distrust, far from unwarranted. Hart had to meet and overcome this feeling, as best he might; and he had also to impress upon his European staffs and their native territorial colleagues what their relative powers, duties, and responsibilities were, and what mutual relations they would be expected to cultivate. Indeed, he had to depend on his own thinking and foreseeing brain for his plans and opinions, and then to teach subordinates to act accordingly. Before him at the outset was only a clean slate—a new institution of vast potential development to be reared, its future uncertain and himself alone the architect. But he had imagination, confidence, vision,—and he went forward, seldom hesitating or looking back.

In 1864 he made Peking his permanent headquarters, directing and organising the distant offices by correspondence from the capital, while in close personal touch with the Chinese foreign office and with the legations. The new system, not obstructive to trade, but managed simply and without corruption, brought in a yearly growing revenue which in amount surprised as well as rejoiced the Peking exchequer,—and made the service and its head *persona grata* with the central government, however inwardly ill-disposed were the native local officials at the ports, whose time-honored “rake

off" it had strangled. By 1866, the indemnities for the war of 1858-60 had been paid off—and from the customs revenues; whereupon the Chinese foreign office announced its satisfaction with the service and its purpose to prolong it indefinitely. The tariff was very low—a basis of only 5 per cent, levied at specific rates both on imports and exports. China was precluded by the foreign powers from raising it; indeed it has been changed but little down to this day. Yet, with the increase which has taken place in the number of open ports of trade, and the natural growth of China's commerce, the annual collection has risen from 8,500,000 taels in 1864 to 35,500,000 taels in 1910.³ This gain is due in part to the addition of new departments of customs collecting work handed over to Hart from time to time;—indeed even a part of China's *internal revenue* both from opium and from general commodities has been entrusted to the foreign customs for management, for several years. China was never niggard with the inspector general in the grant of funds for the cost of collection; on the other hand he rendered accurate quarterly and annual accounts of what was spent. The government did not criticise the rates Hart fixed for salaries and wages, nor the allowances he chose to issue for rent, travel, leaves of absence, etc. All these things down to the wages of the lowest office messengers and boatmen were determined absolutely by regulations which he himself made—as one of the many features of his organization. A professional accountant was engaged from the treasury in London, who came to China, studied the conditions, drafted a complete system of accounts-keeping rules, and made a tour of all the ports instructing the commissioners and clerks in details, and opening the books. The system then established continues in force—with but few changes—today. Hart himself, with characteristic sense of responsibility and capacity for detail, maintained a fixed custom of requiring the books in which the service general accounts were summarised and kept up to date in the audit department at Peking, to be brought to him every Saturday for

³ One tael equals about 66 cents, United States currency, 1910.

examination. It was amazing his grasp of details, and the time and minute personal attention he freely gave to every branch of the service affairs. The undying tale that the Chinese government gave him an allowance of so much with which he was to run the service—keeping the unspent balance for himself—is not true. He accounted for all he spent, and as for himself he received a fixed salary—probably the same as that of his predecessor, Mr. Lay, which Mr. Andrew Wilson, author of the *Ever Victorious Army* tells us was £8000. If this was Hart's salary, every penny of it was well earned. There never was higher loyalty, completer self devotion, or more splendid ability placed at the service of an employer—or with better results. As the customs grew in variety of functions, extent of field, amount of collections, and number of personnel, Chinese and foreign, the annual grant from the government for its maintenance was increased at intervals. The story is told that some native official once memorialised the government to the effect that the service was costing too much under Hart's régime and that he himself, the memorialist, would undertake to carry it on with a far smaller appropriation. This memorial was passed on by the foreign office to Hart for his answer. He replied by declaring, that so far from admitting that the present grant was too great, he must point out that it had become too small, and concluded his despatch by soliciting an increase of so and so much in the annual allowance! The result was what he had expected: the grant was increased!

I have mentioned the thoroughness—reaching to all details—with which his early organizing work was done. One aim was to create *uniformity* at all the offices. Calling for lists of the employees of every description from every port, he classified, ranked, and graded them—fixing the pay of each grade. Then was published the first service list, to be followed yearly by a fresh list showing the enrollment, rank, nationality and station of every man—the series affording a history not merely of each man's career but of the growth of the organization as the years rolled by. A system, a piece of machinery like this, once instituted was

never dropped or permitted to deteriorate in quality or accuracy or in the variety and fulness of records it afforded. On the other hand it was modified and steadily improved as circumstances demanded changes. At present the list is issued in both English and Chinese. The natural requirements of a large constituency of intelligent merchants were met by the publication quarterly of statistics of the separate imports and exports of trade at each and all the ports, of the movement of treasure, and of shipping. Annually, complete volumes of similar, but more elaborate, statistics are issued,—accompanied by reports on the trade of each port written by the local commissioners, and by a general report on the trade of China as a whole, drawn up by the statistical secretary. In point of clearness, completeness and typography, these annual volumes leave little to be desired. They are published both in English and in Chinese,—and may be found in several of the great libraries of our own country as well as of Europe. And, what is more valuable to the general student, and deserves to be known better than it is known, Hart caused to be published at the close of each decade beginning with the period 1881–1890 a collective volume of *Decennial Reports*, embracing each port and its surrounding district, prepared by the several commissioners, detailing—according to a systematized arrangement drafted by Hart himself—the history and development during the decennium, of the port's industries, trade, governmental affairs, productions, etc., and recording all important events, improvements, and the like, accompanied by maps, and as a whole constituting an invaluable record for the student of the modern and modernising Middle Kingdom.

Little escaped Hart's indefatigable hand—little that could enhance the value of the customs service to China or to the public. Concise books of instructions in their duties were drawn up and distributed to the employees; instructions for the commissioners and their assistants, instructions for the heads of the outdoor department, for the examiners of goods, and for the watchers of shipping—all aiming to teach each man how to perform his work, what he should and what he should not do. These instructions improved the discipline

and efficiency of the staffs, and ensured a liberal, courteous, and helpful attitude on the part of custom clerks and examiners in dealing with travellers and with the stationary commercial public who had duties to pay. It was a fixed principle with Hart—understood by every man in the service, high or low—that each employee ought to be enabled to know clearly what was expected of him; and, with this known, men must be held strictly to doing it. Those who fell short were sure to hear of it promptly and emphatically; those who did well, even the humblest, were rewarded with promotion when the right time and place came; while such as showed exceptional fitness were culled out and advanced to the most responsible posts. A system of semi-annual confidential reports on the personnel was instituted in 1868, and always maintained; indeed Hart never revoked an ordinance which he had once instituted—he would modify after trial and experience, but he never repealed.

The service steadily grew larger, as international crises arising from time to time were settled by the opening of new ports so-called, i.e., new points of trade and contact, many of them at interior or at land frontier towns. But the service was never too big for Hart to manage. The Chefoo convention of 1876 with Britain, which settled the Margary murder, provided for the opening of Wenchow, Pakhoi, Wuhu, and Ichang (and of Chungking later) on the Upper Yangtze. The Tongking imbroglio with France in 1884–85 was followed by the opening of Lungchow, and Mengtsz in remote Kwangsi and in Yunnan on China's southern frontier. The defeat of China by Japan in 1895 led to the opening of the large cities of Soochow and Hangchow. The war between Japan and Russia in 1905 had for one of its results the opening of Harbin, Antung, Mukden, etc., in the three provinces—still Chinese—of Manchuria. The enlargement of customs work thus entailed, of staffs and correspondence, and the increased distances from Peking, were not too formidable for Hart's organization to cope with; he seemed always to have spare men of all grades ready to go out and begin work on the well known lines at new points. The trained men required, he always had; and vacant

places at the older ports were speedily replenished with recruits from his waiting list—a list kept close at hand and from which he could draw by a telegram to London. Here was a special agency of the Chinese customs, efficiently and loyally directed by Mr. James Duncan Campbell—who had been in China in the service, than whom a more competent man could not have been found. All candidates of whatever nationality had to pass Campbell's tests and personal scrutiny before they could obtain enrollment as suitable. Similar care was also taken in China in selecting the large number of native recruits who filled the clerkships. Thus, when new demands arose, even suddenly, the service was elastic enough to meet them.

There is one other feature of the organization which I may not fail to mention—the practice of transferring clerks, assistants, commissioners, and even examiners and inspectors (i.e., the “out-door men”) from one port to another every few years. These transfers took place in considerable number each spring; so that every man after ten or fifteen years would have served at several ports in different parts of China, and, with the exception of the commissioners alone, would have worked under a variety of chiefs, and in a variety of climates. The advantages of this practice were many. It was only fair to men who had lived three or four years in the enervating south, that they should be given a change to the north, or that men who had endured the rather solitary existence of a small out of the way place in mid-China should be enabled to exchange the hardships of social stagnation for the joys of a bustling community like Shanghai or Hankow. Further, it was just to all under a system by which (as I have said above) every employee's merits and deficiencies were semi-annually reported confidentially to the inspector general, that the employee should be reported upon by a succession of different chiefs; so that the inspector general might form his judgment of a man upon the estimates of several commissioners and not on the opinion of only one or two. The practice of frequent transfers increased the men's experience, maintained their interest in their work, and tended to unify procedure at all the ports; while affording

an easy path for removing quietly men who could not work with certain colleagues or who were unsuitable to the local community. Referring to my own experience I may say that my life in China was far more pleasant, and my work was done with more zest, in that I served for three or four or five years, not longer, at *each* of eight different stations—from Peking to Canton, and from Shanghai to Kiukiang.

One feature of the customs organization was the statistical department, established at the central port of Shanghai. This establishment combined the two functions of (1) publication *plus* printing, and (2) the assembling and compilation of trade statistics and reports. Under a chief possessing Hart's imagination and incapable of finding any kind of work deary or uninviting, the statistical department was a most interesting field—by no means what our American name "Government Printing Office" somehow signifies to me. The head manager, known as the statistical secretary, not merely printed and distributed the regular returns and reports to the mercantile and official public; it was one of his tasks to receive and inspect the ports' quarterly official statements of revenue collected, and of expenditures. These documents had to be drawn up four-fold in both English and Chinese—a set from each port—and were passed on to the Chinese treasury and to the foreign office. They were elaborate and detailed; and Hart would not tolerate the least flaw, or error, untidiness or carelessness of form in the preparation of a single one of them. These documents if not correct and perfect in form were invariably returned swiftly to the office of issue, to be replaced by fresh ones. Hart never accepted less by a hair than what he had required. The result was that the Chinese foreign office received from him nothing that was ill-done; and the Chinese principle is—in theory at least—that a careless report made to a superior office is a breach of propriety, a want of respect. The published *Yellow Books* from the statistical department are models of care, taste, completeness and good workmanship; because Hart would accept nothing less. More than this: he encouraged such of his subordinates as might choose to write monographs on China subjects, to do so, and these

if meritorious were published for sale or for distribution. A paper on Chinese music, a collection of Chinese terms and phrases gathered by some ambitious employee in a wide and patient reading of the native literature, or a minute and accurate descriptive list of the thousand and one articles which comprise China's trade: many such useful works Hart published, as a credit to their authors and a distinction to the service. He also published volumes of special reports, for example, one on silk, another on tea, others on opium, etc.; or again a collection of China's treaties giving all the texts in which they were drawn up, taken from the official copies. Many successive volumes of medical reports on diseases in China, made semi-annually by European physicians practising in different parts of that country were issued by his direction. A broad minded man he furthered everything of value to China, which came within the scope of his control.

The provision of aids to navigation such as lighthouses, lightships, buoys, beacons, etc., for the benefit of China's sea, riverine and harbor shipping was early placed by the Chinese government in his hands with full powers. Engaging expert engineers, and consulting the navigators themselves familiar with the coast of China, he first drew up a lighthouse building program extending through a series of years. Only the best illuminating methods of their time were introduced. And to this day the dangerous China coast is so well lighted and marked that—as Hart once expressed it—"navigation has been made as easy as walking down Regent Street when the gas is lit." He seemed to lose sight of no detail during the years when this work was being done; among other things insisting that wherever possible the materials used on a lighthouse, the workmen, and such current supplies as food and boats should be those to be obtained on the spot,—the aim being to convert the naturally suspicious, prejudiced or even hostile sea-coast population to a feeling of confidence and good will. In 1908 when Sir Robert Hart left China, the customs service was maintaining 132 lighthouses and lightships, not to mention many buoys and beacons or the steamers required to visit, inspect

and supply them. In these matters, as in everything he touched Hart was thorough, studying and directing details himself, and taking a deep interest of a personal kind in all that he had to do. He selected the lightkeepers, he chose the officers of the lightships and light-tending steamers—taking infinite pains to appoint just the men who would be contented with their billets and would by nature suit the work best. On one occasion, for instance, on a tour of the light houses he observed that a certain lightkeeper had given much attention to breeding and keeping a variety of domestic animals for the love of it, whereupon he transferred the man to a post on a large island—where he might keep bigger flocks and more poultry and teach the islanders how to rear and care for them.

Beyond these varied activities which belonged to his recognized duties and responsibilities as head of the customs many others of an extraneous kind were imposed upon him and upon the customs service by the Chinese government. A commission of enquiry was sent to Cuba and Peru to report on the condition and treatment of Chinese coolie laborers in those countries. Two commissioners of customs accompanied and guided this mission; with the beneficent result that the condition of these wretched beings was permanently alleviated by diplomatic action. The work of assembling Chinese products and manufactures and the exhibition of them as the Chinese government's displays at the successive world's fairs, Vienna in 1873, Philadelphia in 1876, Paris in 1878 and 1900, Berlin (fisheries) in 1880, and New Orleans (cotton) in 1883, these tasks were assigned to Hart to be managed by the customs service. Other special missions and frontier delimitation, were also entrusted to Hart and his subordinates.

Besides these extraordinary occasions of international duty to be performed, there were international gales to be weathered, or opportunities to be improved. Here Hart's advice was sometimes sought by the Chinese ministers, owing to his confidential relations with them. This was a special kind of service, quite outside the limits of his office as inspector general; and it must have been fraught with no

slight anxieties and perplexities. It was not Hart's nature, indeed it would have been most unwise, unasked to volunteer suggestions beyond his recognised functions. But he was not infrequently consulted in critical entanglements; and for negotiation he possessed taste and skill. One would have thought his regular work as much as one man could do—especially with his high standard of quality; but Hart aspired to lead China into the path of progress, to help her in the way of safety, to shield her from aggression and from the perils of partition which repeatedly threatened in consequence of her blind conservatism, or obstructiveness, or weakness, or fatuous blunders. Early in the sixties he was overjoyed by her seeming advance towards Occidental education promised by the creation of the Tung Wen Kuan Colleges at Peking and at Canton. But through ill causes which Hart could not stem, these institutions lapsed into discouraging stagnation and uselessness; and yet, as I know from my own correspondence with him when I was stationed at Canton, he refused to accept my belief that the college there was beyond hope. As Mr. Ku Hung-ming declared, "The great man is always an optimist;" and Hart based his unconquerable hope for the future of these schools on the slender fact that they had indeed turned out in three decades two or three able men whom he was proud to name. He lived on the tiptoe of expectation that some miracle would occur or some heaven-sent prophet would arise to fling wide the doors of reform. He was delighted in 1866 with the appointment of the humble secretary of the foreign office, Mr. Pin, to accompany him as a semi-official envoy to Europe; he hoped that even this might be the "dawn," though indeed it was not much "like thunder." The times were not ripe for China's awakening, but this event—come when it might—could never have surprised him; and for my part I would fain have witnessed his content when at last after the Boxer fanaticism came the deep and sincere reaction, the popular regeneration in favor of modern education, followed—after the Russo-Japanese war—by genuine reforms in government, police, military affairs, the press, and opium abolition, in a word a new national birth.

I well recall, for I witnessed it, the joyous hope which animated him, when the Burlingame mission was sent forth in 1868; nor indeed was that enterprise without lasting advantage for hard-pressed China. She needed time, sympathy and consideration from western powers—and this respite from relentless pressure Anson Burlingame gained for her in Europe, while Hart then and later clung to the same policy in Peking.

History, I think, will give to him a share of the credit for preventing war with Britain in 1876, after the Margary murder, at the very last moment—when hostilities seemed inevitable; and nine years later it was his resourcefulness, his boldness, his unfaltering perseverance, even his ingenuity, that brought to an abrupt and surprising end the wearisome and exhausting hostilities of 1884–85 known as the Tongking imbroglio. The tale is a dramatic one, but it is too long and the plot is too complex to be related here. The seizure by the French admiral of the little steamer *Feihoo* of the Chinese customs was Hart's opportunity. Miss Bredon tells the story, thought too superficially; but Hart was still living when her book appeared. Through the French minister Hart tried to get the steamer released. The minister was lukewarm; only the admiral could return the steamer—better apply in Paris. Then the drama secretly developed. Hart had caught from M. Patenôtre and Admiral Courbet an extremely slender thread. But it was Ariadne's thread—he seized it silently, instantly, and in a few months he led both China and France out of a labyrinth from which they longed (France no less than China) to be freed—yet within whose intricacies both had become hopelessly lost. To Paris he sent the customs' London secretary, the cautious loyal Campbell, who had much shrewdness of his own and possessed an abounding faith in Hart. Secretly Campbell applied to Monsieur Ferry for the rendition of the insignificant little steamer—and presently he drew from his pocket no less mysteriously some telegrams from his Peking chief—proposing terms for a protocol of peace. Ferry trusted them—he knew the reputation of Sir Robert Hart and the influence he wielded at the Chinese court. Hart was act-

ing with the support of the foreign office. Ferry accepted the terms, but before they were formally signed came a sudden Chinese success in arms at Langson. This threw things once more into confusion; Ferry's ministry fell in a tumult; "France must reinforce, continue the war, and recover her prestige," cried everybody; while the war party in China again grew aggressive and confident. Hart's unsuspected negotiations hung trembling in the balance. There was a brief interval of anxiety, but for him never despair. Presently, he triumphed; the peace protocol was signed. France had receded from her demand for an indemnity, the chief point worth China's fighting; while China dropped her claim—morally just (though shadowy to all practical purposes)—to the suzerainty of Tonking. This one achievement was worth to China many times what Hart and his liberally endowed customs service—had they done nothing else—ever cost her. As a spice of personal revenge on the French minister and admiral for their cavalier pettiness in this *Feihoo* matter—it must have been sweet to the inspector general, while it was free of vindictiveness and did a great service to both countries. The minister knew nothing of what was going on till he was startled by the news that peace had been signed by Mr. Campbell and a French official in Paris!⁴

The year 1885 was one of the most momentous and most glorious of Hart's career. While the French negotiation filled his thoughts, he was startled by a telegram from the foreign office in London tendering him the appointment of British minister. It came from the Liberal Granville cabinet; and when, immediately after, the Conservatives came in into power, the offer was renewed by Lord Salisbury. To the public it seemed inexplicable that the British government should choose as the guardian of its interests a man who had become the exponent of the Chinese view of political questions at Peking. But there are some who declare that

⁴ It is to be regretted that in her attractive book already referred to Miss Bredon should have permitted herself to put an insulting slur upon the memory and the services of Mr. Campbell in her account of this dramatic negotiation. Sir Robert Hart himself would have been the very last to countenance an act of this kind.

the British government's general instructions to its ministers—perhaps from about this time—used to contain for their final injunction the advice,—“When in doubt, consult Sir Robert Hart.”

At first Hart accepted the appointment; it must have seemed to him to promise a fine culmination of his career, the summit of his ambition. But after a few weeks he determined to decline the proffered honor, and to remain as he had so long been, the inspector general or “I. G.”—the head of the imperial customs. Exactly why he chose this course I can only conjecture. He may have foreseen his liability to be forced into an attitude of hostility towards the Chinese government, whom he had so long sympathetically served. Perhaps he apprehended the possible coldness or unfriendliness of the British consuls, whom he would have to direct and on whose assistance he must depend. But I do not believe that these were the reasons which determined his decision. I think he shrunk from abandoning a post for which he knew he was well fitted—from ceasing his efforts to *lead* and help China as her employee and adviser; and further that he could not endure to see the great service which he had so industriously built up out of his own brain, and with such unrelenting toil, devotion and hope, fall into hands perhaps less devoted and less capable than his own. At all events the announcement that he had decided to continue to be their inspector general, was welcomed enthusiastically by the customs men everywhere. An address of congratulation was presented to him by the service.

There yet lay before him almost a quarter of a century which Hart was destined still to devote to China. The first great measure to demand his attention was the transference of the collection of the internal revenue tax (or “*Likin*”) on opium from the native inland collectorates to the foreign customs offices. It was purely an administrative customs business, but the problem was intricate, the revenue at stake amounted to millions, and the change must be made at all places on the same fixed day, close at hand. A single error in the instructions given to the customs offices might entail troublesome complaints from Chinese officials, or

outcry and "claims" from opium importers; it might produce irremediable confusion. Here was precisely the kind of operation that the inspector general delighted to undertake. The procedure was complicated; the readjustment radical. Of the opium affected the new customs treatment had to be differentiated according to the precise stage of taxation which each several lot had reached on the crucial day. At the same time a fresh system had to be devised and set in motion, which should be applied in future to all opium arriving. Written instructions—there was barely time to circulate them to the ports before they must be acted on. But like all Hart's directions these were orderly, clear, precise; by telegraph from Peking he dealt no less promptly and clearly with such special difficulties as arose here and there, and in a day the changed system was in calm operation. The new opium Likin scheme was a masterpiece of able administration.

Next followed the Tibetan or Sikkim question, involving negotiations between Peking and the Indian government. These were conducted chiefly by Sir Robert Hart by telegraph, in addition of course to his regular work, which of itself was onerous enough. He now purposed returning to England, and began the necessary preparations. Yet the moment seemed never to come when he could safely leave his post. The Chinese-Japanese war broke out in 1894-95; of course he would not ask leave of absence at such a juncture. Next came the opening of the West River to trade; and after that the strife for concessions among the European legations in Peking became most menacing—the actual partition of China was begun. The coup-d'état of 1898 followed—and Hart was still in Peking, no possibility of leaving China at so critical a time! In this way year followed year, with the faithful inspector general still at his desk striving to save what he could of China's tattered sovereignty, and at all events successfully holding her invaluable revenue service steady and unshaken on its course. Lady Hart with her children had returned from Peking to England in 1882; but how could the inspector general hope to join them while China was in such dire straits?

So far from dropping his task, Hart even took on in 1897 a new enterprise of mammoth proportions—the creation of a postal service to be gradually extended over the entire empire. The foreign office memorialized the throne in advocacy of this proposal; the emperor issued an edict of approval. On Hart's confident and willing—if overburdened—shoulders was laid this immense task. He was made inspector general of posts. Up to this time China had no conception of a national post office functioning everywhere. The Chinese had known hitherto only petty express agencies, private letter-carrying “shops,” operating on a few main routes, for comparatively high charges. Vested interests must be handled tenderly, else popular hostility would be aroused, and the new scheme would instantly forfeit the support of a timid government and of a luke-warm public opinion. At the outset there was to be expected little or no financial aid from the impoverished indemnity-ridden Chinese exchequer. And a staff of postal men must be organized—Chinese and European—and the many novices taught their work. The appropriations devoted to the customs establishments were made to bear the new expenditures—being treated in the accounts as advances to be refunded when the postal service after some years should have become a success, and should have obtained fiscal appropriations of its own. Customs men, customs buildings, customs funds everywhere were most liberally and fully devoted to the new development—in addition to their time honored regular uses. There was no other way. That quality of elasticity to which, as I have said before, Hart had early habituated the service which he had built up, was now subjected to its severest tension. But Hart could generally command a loyalty akin to his own, and he never hesitated to exact obedience. He had always required his foreign employees to study the Chinese language and customs; and besides these the service possessed within its ranks very many native clerks of thorough office training and of no small acquaintance with English. Upon this loyalty and fitness Hart drew copiously. Within a few years the coasting and riverine steamers, and the few railways had become China's contract mail carriers.

From every open port radiated mail routes into the interior, served according to local conditions by boats, by mules, by couriers on foot. Gradually the great interior provinces were covered with a net work of postal routes. The largest offices were placed in charge of such men as had demonstrated most interest, ability, and general fitness for their work. Hart's watchfulness and that of his chief lieutenants at headquarters was never relaxed. At length the central and the provincial governments became full converts and sincere supporters of the national post office, and grants in aid where necessary were made. Today China regards the postal service as no less essential to the life and business of the nation than it is elsewhere over the globe. It is no longer dependent on the mother service, but has its own separate existence. In 1912 there were over 6000 postal establishments, with 127,000 miles of courier connections, and the service dealt with 421,000,000 of postal articles.⁵

How shall one speak adequately of that cruel summer of 1900 when China's so loyal helper was suddenly entrapped, together with the entire Peking foreign community in the onrushing tempest of the Boxer fanaticism? True, Hart foresaw the approach of peril but he misjudged the time of the outburst. He had taken steps to prepare his Peking staff for sending away wives and children as the danger increased, but he was too late! The German minister was murdered. Behold the Boxers within the city gates, sweeping all before them—burning and slaughtering. The little community was at bay fighting for life. Like all others, Hart left his house and his invaluable papers, the offices with their archives of fifty years, and sought refuge in the legation

⁵ It may be taken as probable that Hart's success in creating and more especially in extending the postal service by gradual steps until it covered the empire, led directly to the conviction in his own mind that the sorely needed reorganization, reform and purification of the national land tax might be accomplished in a similar way. And it is not at all unlikely that his published *Land Tax Proposals*, though negatived when they were made, will yet be adopted in principle if and when the present Chinese government feels itself strong enough to grapple with the subject. But it requires almost "the gestation of a thousand years" to produce a man of Hart's experience, devotedness, and energy—fit to achieve so Herculean a task.

area. He took with him only a small roll of blankets, and a few clothes. Strangely enough, he believed that the customs premises would be spared because they belonged to the government! In fact, they were speedily with their contents burned to the ground. At the beginning of the siege Hart had little hope that the foreigners could be saved. To me at Tientsin he sent by a trusty coolie, who took his life in his hand to bring the note, this desperate touching message written in ink on a small scrap of paper; what volumes it speaks!

Legations ordered to leave Peking in 24 hours!!!—R. H.

19 June, 1900, 4 p. m. Good bye!

Pay bearer Tls. 100.—R. H.

Drew,
Customs,
Tientsin.

I need not dwell on the thrilling tale of the eight weeks that followed. For the hard pressed Europeans it is a story of suffering, of horror, of death, of wondrous fortitude, of unflinching tenacity and courage. The world's history affords few examples of equal heroism displayed by women and by men. Sir Robert, then in his sixty-sixth year, was too old to take his place rifle in hand in the muddy trenches or behind the sand bags; but his confidence, his Irish good humor were conspicuous among the besieged; and the spectacle of his serenity, sympathy and helpfulness, as he moved about, fortified both the timorous and the brave. Needless to say, he shared privations and faced dangers on an equal footing with the humblest around him. At the mess table, when horse meat was served for the first time, on being asked how he liked it, he smacked his lips and replied, "Now I have discovered what it was that my cook used to serve for my dinner parties, when I had charged him to spare no pains to get a specially fine piece of mutton!"

During those desperate weeks his thoughts must have striven to forecast the political outcome for China, if the armies of the allied powers should reach Peking and raise

the siege and inaugurate the day of reckoning. What would be the fate of the empire, and what the fate of the great service which he had spent forty tireless years in building up? Would it still be permitted to endure? Could the new postal service hope to be saved from wreck and allowed to continue its growth?

No sooner was the siege over than the inspector general gallantly took up his work. The city—all round about the legations—he found to be naught but bare walls of brick amid heaps of ruins. He did not forget to telegraph to London—to his one and only tailor—for suits of heavy clothes; winter was drawing near. He discovered two vacant rooms in the rear of Mr. Kierulff's shop in the legation quarter; these now became the head office of the inspectorate general! Here I found him at Christmas four months later with a few of the best men in the service by his side—gathering up the tangled threads and restoring the disordered fabric.

Hart's first step when safe once more, was to cast about him for the former head of the Chinese foreign office, Prince Ch'ing, in order to bring China again into official relations with the ministers of the foreign powers. Obviously the main thing to be done was to open negotiations, to arrange preliminary terms of peace, to get the foreign troops called in from the country around Peking, and so spare the afflicted peasantry. Government all over north China had become demoralized and order must replace the threatened chaos. Prince Ch'ing was soon found by Sir Robert and was easily induced to begin peace making. This was a service of incalculable value to the future of China. Hart then wrote that series of seasonable articles which appeared rapidly in various magazines, while public attention was still intent on the Chinese question, pointing out to Europe and to America the causes of the Boxer fury and the consequences to be expected in the future of injustice perpetrated by the great powers against the integrity and the rights of China. These essays, collected and published with the title *These from the Land of Sinim*, still stand as a warning to the leaders of world politics and dollar diplomacy. It is a marvellous instance

of Hart's fidelity to China and devotion to duty, that even after his bitter experience of cruel indifference and ingratitude, he harbored no personal resentment. He took no holiday, no respite for recuperation after the siege. His capacity and inclination for work seemed as unerring and as strong as ever; he soon had the reins in his controlling hands, and the customs and postal services kept on their steady way. It is needless to say that during the lawless autumn of 1900, when looting and loot buying was a fashionable orgy in Peking, Hart with a quiet scorn would have no part in it. He did not even permit himself to walk through the palaces of the Forbidden City, then abandoned by the court and guarded by the troops of the allies.⁶

The empress dowager, on her return to Peking, summoned him to private audience. As he entered the presence chamber she covered her face and expressed her shame and mortification for the treatment he had suffered.

Sir Robert remained at his post more than seven years after the events of 1900. He stayed long enough to behold the beginnings of the changing China. The education reform, the Japanese-Russian war, the miraculous crusade against opium, the pledges of a new constitution with parliaments and a limited monarchy; these great events marked his closing period in China. No wonder it seemed that he could not find the moment when he might leave Peking and go once more to England. He had been "home" but twice since his first arrival in the East in 1854, namely, in 1866 when he was married, and in 1878 when he was special commissioner for China at the Paris Exposition. Lady Hart now came back herself to Peking, in 1906, and induced him to take leave of absence. The state of his health—at last—re-inforced her persuasions. He left China in 1908, and arriving in London entered for the first time the house where had been for twenty years the home of his wife and children.

⁶ In July, 1900, false telegrams from China reported that the besieged inmates of the legations had been overpowered and massacred. These were too widely credited, and a few weeks afterwards Hart—as well as a number of others—had the satisfaction of reading in the London *Times* of July 17 long notices of their own careers with candid criticisms of their deficiencies and their public services!

He was an old man of seventy-three. Many and great honors were now conferred upon him in his own country by cities and universities.

China now witnessed momentous changes; the statesman Chang Chih-tung died, the emperor and the Dowager empress "ascended to be guests on high." A weak regency followed. The regent, to satisfy a foolish revenge, took the fatal step of dismissing China's wisest minister Yuan Shih-kai. Repeated messages from the Peking foreign office appealed to Sir Robert to return to China. His answer was, "Yes, so soon as my health will permit." But, alas, this was not to be. Robert Hart had finished his course, a worn out man at last! Early in the autumn of 1910 he died of pneumonia, in the country near London. He was buried at Bisham Church not far from Marlow. He had not lived to witness the great events of 1911; but the revolution could not have surprised him. Years before he had pointed to the impending fate of the decadent Tsings—the once illustrious House of Kang Hsi and Kien Lung.

Of Sir Robert Hart's personal characteristics there is no time here to speak at length. His daily life was a fixed routine from which it greatly irked him to be diverted. After morning tea with Virgil or Horace as his companion, he devoted an hour to the violin—for he delighted in music. Nine o'clock found him in his office, where he worked standing at his desk—with an old railway rug strapped round him in winter. At ten he received his secretaries, heard their reports and gave directions. This routine being despatched, he settled down to his own tasks alone. In doing business he was stern, brief, exact and exacting. His directions to his staff, short and unmistakable, were issued in writing; and no one ventured to question them unless sure of strong grounds for objection or criticism. Usually the inspector general would be found to be possessed of fuller information and to have thought deeper than the objector, and discomfiture followed. At noon he left his office for a walk in the garden around the house. This was the practice hour for his band—Chinese musicians led by a European. At this time children (of whom he was a merry companion) walked and gossiped with him. After lunch, usually eaten alone,

and a short nap, he was again in his office where he wrote till dark or even later. In the afternoon he did not permit himself to be disturbed. Work over, he walked again, frequently alone, in the garden. After dinner he read, first something serious, philosophy, biography or poetry,—then finishing the evening with a novel. History, strange to say, did not attract him. He was abstemious in a general sense, though he did not refrain entirely from wine or tobacco. He was by no means unsocial, as a member of the Peking community; he made calls, he dined out, and himself gave a dinner party weekly through the winter season, followed by a dance. Nor was he ever too old to share in the quadrille and the lancers. But these evening festivities were confined within those bounds of time which the morrow's work demanded; when eleven o'clock came, the band struck up a stated march—the signal, familiar to every guest, to say "Good night" and go home. His Christmas trees year after year, who that were children in Peking can ever forget them! Such generosity, such an effort (sometimes pathetically mistaken) that each gift should exactly suit the receiver! Each parcel had been selected, done up, and marked by Sir Robert's own hand! But also such a rigid injunction to disperse promptly when the hour struck! Though to many persons Hart's life would seem an inflexible slavery to routine, yet he was one of the most interesting of men. There was nothing in the wide world far or near to which he was indifferent. He was full of imagination, with a deep vein of superstition even. Coincidences, signs, telepathy had the greatest attraction for him, he was always looking out for them and found them everywhere. When the protocol of the treaty with France in 1885 was at last agreed to—a welcome release from a protracted strain of suspense—he telegraphed even from far Peking to Paris, "Don't sign on the first April!"⁷

⁷ An excellent account of Sir Robert Hart's personality, of his relations to the members of the customs service, and of his work, may be found in chapter xvi of Sir Henry Norman's *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, Scribner, 1895.

See also chapter on the "Inspectorate of Customs" in H. B. Morse's *Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire*.

The only institutions of government in China today which have stood firm through the revolution's storm and stress and which seem certain to be permanent, are the two great organizations founded and built up by Robert Hart—the customs, China's one stable source of known revenue, and the postal service, which is spreading new ideas and stimulating popular intelligence throughout the land. These services afford careers to perhaps 20,000 Chinese.

Of late, some of the new leaders among the Chinese have expressed keen resentment because Hart did not train their native fellow countrymen to fill the highest posts in the customs. Rather than display this resentment, these critics might render more useful aid to their country at this crisis by devoting their energies to imitating in other departments of administration the efficient and incorruptible public service which Hart built up. Here is their best field of present reform! Let them imitate the example ready to their hands! It is true that Hart did not train up Chinese to become commissioners of customs at the treaty ports. In the sixties he announced publicly his purpose to do so through the Tung Wen Kwan Colleges at Peking and Canton. That nothing came of this purpose is the fault of the native officials, who degraded those colleges into mere sinecures for permanent, idle (but salaried) "students" so called! Prior to the revolution, there were no cadets to be found of the social standing and birth requisite to make responsible and incorruptible chiefs of the customs offices. Such Chinese young men as chose to come forward did not possess the inherent qualities or the native education to enable them to acquire the prestige necessary for dealing with Chinese official colleagues of the old school, or to exercise due authority over their staffs or among native and foreign merchants at the ports of trade. Besides, the customs service was legally in its nature and origin, a mixed institution, to be conducted under foreigners and in foreign methods. And as with time loans to China were made, the lenders even stipulated that the customs revenues which were pledged as security must be administered according to the existing system and without organic change. In a word Chinese

official ideals of integrity must first be raised, as they will be; and when that time comes, the customs service will require no foreign stiffening.⁸ Sun Yat Sen has taken a juster view of Hart's achievements than some others of his native critics.⁹

The key of Hart's life of patience and loyalty with the Chinese and of his fidelity to duty, was a simple one. To me he wrote in 1867, thinking of slow China, early in his career:

We have not wings, we cannot soar,
But we have feet to scale and climb
By slow degrees, by more and more.
Therefore, learn to labor and *to wait*.

And on the pad on his office desk, Miss Bredon tells us, not long before quitting China he had left these characteristic lines:

If thou hast yesterday thy duty done,
And thereby cleared firm footing for today,
Whatever clouds may dark tomorrow's sun,
Thou shalt not miss thy solitary way!

⁸ Further and plainer language on this topic may be found in Bland's *Recent Events and Present Policies*, p. 209.

⁹ *Sun Yat Sen and the Awakening of China*, by Dr. James Cantlie, p. 248, Dr. Sun calls Hart "the most trusted as he was the most influential of 'Chinese.'"